



# Peel's Growing Success Monograph Series: Clarifying Success Criteria, Grades 1-12

CISESS, Peel District School Board

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**"Students can hit any target they can see that holds still for them".-Rick Stiggins**

## Policy

As essential steps in assessment *for* learning and *as* learning, teachers need to:

- plan assessment concurrently and integrate it seamlessly with instruction;
- share **learning goals** and **success criteria** with students at the outset of learning to ensure that students and teachers have a common **and shared understanding** of these **goals** and **criteria** as learning progresses;
- gather information about student learning before, during, and at or near the end of a period of instruction, using a variety of assessment strategies and tools;
- use assessment to inform instruction, guide next steps, and help students monitor their progress towards achieving their learning goals; analyse and interpret evidence of learning;
- give and receive specific and timely descriptive feedback about student learning;
- help students to develop skills of peer and self-assessment.

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### **Criterion-referenced Assessment**

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Assessment that focuses on whether a student's performance meets a predetermined standard, level, or set of criteria rather than on the student's performance measured in relation to the performance of other students..

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## Context

Students' interest in learning and their belief that they can learn are critical to their success. After reviewing the impact of testing on students' motivation to learn, Harlen and Deakin Crick (p. 203) recommended the use of assessment *for* learning and *as* learning - including strategies such as sharing learning goals and **success criteria**, providing feedback in relation to goals, and developing students' ability to self-assess - as a way of increasing students' engagement in and commitment to learning.

The use of assessment for the purpose of improving learning and helping students become independent learners requires a culture in which student and teacher learn together in a collaborative relationship, each playing an active role in setting learning goals, **developing success criteria**, giving and receiving feedback, monitoring progress, and adjusting learning strategies.

The teacher acts as a "lead learner", providing support while gradually releasing more and more responsibility to the student, as the student develops the knowledge and skills needed to become an independent learner.

### ***What are criteria and why do we set them?***

***-Kathleen Gregory, Caren Cameron, Anne Davies***

Criteria are, simply, the standards by which something can be judged or valued. When we determine these criteria, we are deciding what counts. Teachers can set criteria for their students. Students can set or negotiate their own criteria...When students take part in developing criteria, they are much more likely to understand what is expected of them, “buy in,” and then accomplish the task successfully. In our classrooms, we usually set criteria for projects and assignments with our students. We do not set criteria for everything, nor should we. We regularly remind ourselves of the purpose of using criteria by asking the question, “**How is this supporting student learning?**”

### ***Anchor Chart***

Chart that is co-created by teachers and students as a way to record thinking (e.g., about a text, problem or strategy) and make it visible for future reference and study. Anchor charts can also list procedures and processes for a particular activity (e.g., the stages of the writing process, the problem-solving process in Mathematics). They help students clarify thinking, make connections and/or remember a specific skill, strategy or concept.

## **Success Criteria & Criteria for Judgement**

**Success criteria** are the criteria teachers set with or communicate to students to help them to meet established learning goals. The Critical Thinking Consortium (TC2) also has a component of their critical thinking framework called **Criteria for Judgment** which are the factors or qualities that a sound or wise option will embody. Students use criteria for judgement to assess the quality of their own or others’ thinking as they resolve a problem, justify a position or perspective or select the best option available. It is important for teachers to note that both conceptions of criteria are essential for improving student learning and the quality of the thinking that students generate.

### **Both kinds of criteria should be:**

- Manageable in number for the level of the student (very young students may be able to handle only one or two criteria);
- Represent the most important or relevant considerations;
- Contain no irrelevant considerations.

### **Strategies for identifying criteria:**

- Consider primary purpose of task or assignment for evaluation;
- Think of specific sample answers, some very good and others very poor;
- Think of the categories of the provincial achievement chart and any other standards you are using that might inform the criteria.

### **Deciding upon the criteria:**

- Who decides on the criteria: the teacher, the class as a whole or individual students?;
- The answer depends on various factors such as:
  - extent of student knowledge and skills related to the topic
  - importance of student involvement
  - time constraints
  - level of consensus on the most relevant criteria.

Students need to have a clear picture of all the success criteria and related details/concepts for them to complete a task or assignment successfully in the time frame set by the teacher or a group of teachers. Oftentimes students need scaffolding in the success criteria.

In a collaborative inquiry (TLCP or PLC), it is vitally important that teachers work together to scope out essential success criteria for a rich task and devise a variety of ways for students to get to know, practice and internalize relevant criteria by providing multiple opportunities to have them be actively involved in the assessment process (assessment *for* learning and assessment *as* learning).

If we truly want students to provide us with thoughtful, reasoned responses to thoughtful questions and tasks, we will need to move beyond only eliciting responses which require students to provide facts or statements of personal preference as answers. We want students’ judgements and opinions to reference and be justified by clear criteria as often as possible.

We also want to use criteria to shed light on the learning skills and work habits and important subject-specific standards and processes. In short, we want students to develop their capacity for *critical* thinking in all that they say, do and think about. Teachers should remember that each criterion they use in class is a concept or embeds concepts that often require further clarification.

## What process might be used to co-construct success criteria?

**Setting and Using Success Criteria** (adapted from Davies, Cameron & Gregory):

1. Begin with the **curriculum expectations** (overall and clustered specific expectations) and create student-friendly learning goals for a unit. Create rich tasks with these goals clearly in mind.
2. Identify the dimensions of each task by using the provincial achievement chart category (**Knowledge/Understanding, Thinking, Application, Communication** respectively) according to purpose.
3. Make a brainstormed list of ‘look-fors’ for success in each task.
4. Sort and categorize each task list into **criteria** and **details**.
5. Make and post a T-chart (placing **criteria** on the left and placing relevant **details** on the right).
6. Use authentic samples of student work to revisit/revise the list.

It is vitally important for teachers and students to distinguish between **assignment requirements** (must-haves for format/procedure-i.e. font, font size, colour), and **criteria** (important markers for quality performance tied to curriculum learning goals).

Teachers can use a T-Chart to help co-construct success criteria with their students (see sample below).

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### **Success Criteria**

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Standards or specific descriptions of successful attainment of learning goals developed by teachers on the basis of criteria in the achievement chart, and discussed and agreed upon in collaboration with students, that are used to determine to what degree a learning goal has been achieved. Criteria describe what success “looks like”, and allow the teacher and student to gather information about the quality of student learning.

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### **Teacher Moderation**

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A process for ensuring that the assessment of student learning and the results of assessment and evaluation are comparable across classes and/or schools. In teacher moderation, teachers examine student work together to share beliefs and practices, enhance their understanding, compare their interpretations of student results, and confirm their judgements about a student’s level of achievement. Teachers might also look at the assignment that was given and analyze its effectiveness in relation to the learning achieved by the students.

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### **Sample T – Chart for Co-Constructing Criteria with Students**

Success Criteria	Details

## What supports students in obtaining greater clarity and understanding of success criteria before teacher evaluation?

Criteria Considerations	Met	Not Yet Met
Students obtain greater clarity and understanding of success criteria when there is/are:		
✓ Opportunities to examine various concrete samples to discover which criteria might be important for success for a given task		
✓ Analysis/use of student samples representing a range of student performance that scaffolds more complex learning		
✓ Thoughtful use of provincial or commercial exemplars		
✓ Clarity around provincial achievement chart categories		
✓ Ongoing, thoughtful teacher moderation of student work		
✓ Students work with peers to construct an understanding of the criteria by reviewing and moderating student samples		
✓ Students know how and when to self-assess their own work and thinking against student samples and exemplars		
✓ Learning goals and tasks are clearly articulated in accessible language that students/parents understand		
✓ Criteria are connected to the big ideas in the curriculum		
✓ Parents can support applications of criteria at home		
✓ All assessment and evaluation tools are aligned to and reflect teacher or student-generated success criteria		
✓ There are not too few criteria or too many criteria to master in a given lesson, unit, term or semester-just the right number		
✓ Opportunities to hear from people outside of school talk about what steps are taken to meet success criteria in the workplace and the role of learning skills and work habits		
✓ Classroom evidence of a strong backwards design process moving away from “coverage” of content and topics to teaching for deep conceptual understanding and transfer of important 21 <sup>st</sup> century knowledge and skills.		
✓ Each criterion, as a concept is made clear to students		

## What about ‘success criteria yet to be met’?

Success criteria often appear to students as being deceptively simple, but, because they are the indicators of quality performance, they often conceal layers of complexity underneath (i.e. discrete knowledge, conceptual understanding, skills, dispositions, mindsets).

Therefore, success criteria often need to be “unpacked” or have the details carefully examined by students and teachers in the classroom, in dynamic and interactive ways, so that they can be met, over time.

Co-construction of success criteria is one effective way to unpack and clarify these components as it gives students a greater voice and insight into the assessment process. De-constructing rubrics is another. Teachers can also establish curriculum learning goals and success criteria in language that students and parents can understand. They can invite students to set and reset their own learning goals in response to class goals as they move through a learning sequence.

Teachers monitor, respond and adjust their teaching to help students meet classroom and personal learning goals. Often during assessment *for* learning and assessment *as* learning, students reveal that they have mastered many established success criteria.

However, there are often still some criteria which are still to be met. Opportunities for reflection often enables students to close the gap between where they are now and where they need to go next to meet the all the criteria. Some criteria often take longer for students to master than others.

**Success criteria yet to be met** are communicated to students through descriptive feedback in a variety of forms (written comments on assignments, oral feedback-informal and formal, peer feedback, self-assessment, report card comments under student ‘Strengths’, use of models and samples).

Criteria yet to be met again, focus on the most important considerations for quality work and avoid distractions or considerations which are not really important. Frequent, timely feedback tied back directly to the success criteria is what students need to move forward in their learning.

Last, it is important for students to have opportunities to reflect on and mark their attainment of success criteria so that they internalize and remember the components of each criterion for future performance as part of student assessment *as* learning. Students can then set learning goals to meet all remaining success criteria.

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### ***Learning Goals***

Brief statements that describe for a student what he or she should know and be able to do by the end of a period of instruction (e.g., a lesson, series of lessons, or subtask). The goals represent subsets or clusters of knowledge and skills that the student must master to successfully achieve the overall curriculum expectations.

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*"If the criteria are clear and samples available, then there are many ways to respond to student work and give descriptive feedback".*

**-Dr. Anne Davies**

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***"Critical Thinking is critical thinking"***

**-Dr. Roland Case**

**TC2: The Critical Thinking Consortium**

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### ***Evaluate***

To judge or determine the worth or quality of. Evaluation has a logic and should be carefully distinguished from mere subjective preference. The elements of its logic may be put in the form of questions that may be asked whenever an evaluation is to be carried out: (1) Do we clearly understand what we are evaluating? (2) Are we clear about our purpose? Is our purpose legitimate? (3) Given our purpose, what are the relevant criteria or standards for evaluation? (4) Do we have sufficient information about that which we are evaluating? Is that information relevant to the purpose? (5) Have we applied our criteria accurately and fairly to the facts as we know them?



### **Questions for Further Consideration:**

1. When might it make good sense for teachers to work together to establish common evaluation criteria across a grade, between subject disciplines or within multi-section courses? How and when might students be involved in this process?
2. How might establishing common criteria in a collaborative inquiry (TLCP or PLC) serve to strengthen teachers' individual and collective professional judgement(s)?
3. How might purposeful teacher discussions about assessment and evaluation criteria lead to the creation of more relevant and engaging student tasks?
4. What might teachers do to align established assessment criteria more closely the descriptive feedback they provide to students?
5. What are the advantages for students and teachers of a process of clarifying important success criteria?
6. How might we design questions for students more carefully to elicit student thinking about important success criteria?
7. How might AFL be used to ensure common understanding of success criteria?

### **Intellectual Standards (criteria) for Assessing Critical Thinking**

- Clarity
- Accuracy
- Precision
- Logic
- Relevance
- Depth
- Breadth
- Significance
- Fairness

**-Dr. Richard Paul & Linda Elder**

### **Additional Resources**

- *Growing Success 2010* (Ontario Ministry of Education)
- *AER Gains - Edugains Assessment Glossary* [www.edugains.ca](http://www.edugains.ca)
- *Making Classroom Assessment Work*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, Anne Davies
- *Setting and Using Criteria*, *Knowing What Counts Series*, Gregory, Cameron, Davies
- *Criteria for Criteria: TC2: The Critical Thinking Consortium*, *Critical Thinking Institute Materials*
- *Critical Thinking: Learn the Tools the Best Thinkers Use*, Concise Edition, Paul and Elder